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INTERVIEWERS: WILLIAM LITTLE

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ERNEST CONRAD 00:00:00

The contractors, particularly on public works jobs, University of Washington, Port of Seattle, were employing a proportionate or appropriate number of minorities in construction work, and raised issue to the point where it came to a head at the University of Washington campus, when we were building that big underground garage in the center of the campus. And one morning, he and about fifty or sixty others, I don't know how many total, dumped a bulldozer and truck a few other things into the big lot out there and stop the work. Ben McAdoo, an architect good friend, came to campus that morning and said, stop, do something. My God, the police are

coming and there'll be bloodshed. What we did was finally shut down the job to avoid bloodshed, and held arguments contractors later on about that, we closed it down. And then after that came the discussion with the contractors. I forget what Terry called his organization then, wasn't United Construction.

WILLIAM LITTLE 00:01:17

CCA [Central Contractors Association].

ERNEST 00:01:17

Yeah, CCA organization and started having conversations with the Contractors Organizations. The Associated General Contractors. Dan Ruthford, R-U-T-H-F-O-R-D, was the man who negotiated, sat in for a number of meetings.

ERNEST 00:01:27

Tyree [Scott] was raising questions about the Port of Seattle about the construction work out there. Dick--

WILLIAM 00:01:27

Page. No, no. Dick--

ERNEST 00:01:43

[?Pord?].

WILLIAM 00:01:56

Dick [?Pord?], yeah.

ERNEST 00:02:00

Dick [?Pord?] who's associate manager of the airport, myself, Tyree, Ruthford, and Jim Wilson. It was the legal University had any number of meetings. I can't remember how many, of trying to get the unions to agree to employ appropriate number of people in the program to let people come in as apprentices, and give the minorities a fair shake at construction work.

WILLIAM 00:02:02

I thought he said, piss off and then left. Well, that's what I got, quoted.

ERNEST 00:02:37

The University of Washington, was the first one to agree, and called attention to all the contractors and the flaws in their contract, but said that they would put the thing with the program, federal program they signed under, would get fair, equal employment, and started reporting and gave copies every week to Tyree, of the number of minorities in each of the trades on the campus each week. Didn't resolve all the problems, because we had another time down to Health Sciences when Howard S. Wright, I think was a contractor down there if I remember correctly. Tyree came in one morning at about five o'clock with fifty people, locked up the job, closed the gates. Myself, Jim Wilson, Rutford, sat in there 'till one of the construction shacks down there 'till, I think, 8:30 in the morning to four in the afternoon, policemen all around the project, finally worked out an agreement that was satisfactory. Tyree, these people, they took our word for what we're going to try and do, got the message out and went back to work, and contractors had did their best.

The biggest problem was unions who really weren't willing to give ground and Ruthford and I got the Chamber of Commerce, Jim McCurdy, then president of the Chamber of Commerce in the act. Got to the point where we all went back, I think goes back once or twice. Oh yeah, we've met a number of times in the governor's office, too, in Olympia, with the governor, the unions, minorities, probably fifty-seven contractors, all sitting in a room. I remember one meeting where Austin St. Laurent walked up, got up, walked out. Governor told him to stay. He said, "No, I got an appointment in Seattle." Told the governor--didn't say to go to hell, but almost you could almost read it that way. Took him, and seven members of the union walked out with him. Yeah, but he told the governor, no uncertain terms. He had another date and he was gone out. He left, seven members, seven union leaders left with him. That's a kind of an awkward situation. We went to the governor's office. We went to Washington, DC, Department of Labor. We met with [Arthur] Fletcher and [George] Shultz.

WILLIAM 00:05:00

Do you have any minutes on that detail during the meetings?

ERNEST 00:05:03

I don't think, I didn't think I wanted to keep any, but we met Shultz and Fletcher back in Washington [DC]. [H.W.] McCurdy was there, Conrad and Ruthford and, oh, we went, a couple times. One of the trips, the governor sent Jim Dolliver, his first hand assist, went back with him. What we were trying to do was get the Department of Labor to set up some money, \$250,000-\$300,000 from the Department of Labor to Seattle for a training program. I'm going over a lot of things. We went to court. Remember the judge, Lindsay was his name?

WILLIAM 00:05:48

Lindberg.

ERNEST 00:05:48

Lindberg was very fair and very good, and put them on notice and told the unions what they had to do, and we tried to get the money out of Washington [DC]. The Labor Department backed her two or three times. I remember one meeting where they referred us down to second or third level people, and Ruthford and I, and Tyree, and who else,? Three or four of us. McCurdy was there too, met with the people trying to put a program together. I think these were two or three guys down there representing the department, and I think they--I don't know, I've always assumed, guessed they were ex-union leaders, all white. One of them said to us, because I was being pretty hard on the others, "We don't care what Mr. Fletcher or Mr. Schultz say, you people have to realize, the policies are set down here. Mr. Shultz, Mr. Fletcher, just enunciate." I well remember that. From there, we kind of got unhappy because we couldn't get anywhere, so we called up the guy in the Nixon administration from Seattle.

WILLIAM 00:07:09

[?Alterman?]?

ERNEST 00:07:10

No, John Ehrlichman, and went over to see him. And we got into the White House. He wasn't there, but that former quarterback of the University of Washington Huskies who worked as his right hand met with us and Ehrlichman got called off to another meeting by the President just as we got there. And Todd Hallin, H-A-L-L-I-N, met with us, and we've spent about two or three--we spent an hour going over the whole thing with him, and he promised to try to get Ehrlichman to do something with the Department of Labor.

We weren't sure that was really going to happen. We hoped it would, we weren't sure. We got a tour the White House, got to see the president's office, the old day room, and all this stuff, and the Cabinet Room. That was nice, but we weren't sure anything would happen. So then we called up [Warren] Magnuson's office and told him over the telephone our problem. We were in the White House, we weren't sure we were getting anywhere. So about 3:30 in the afternoon, we were invited to Magnuson's office, we met in the Senate Appropriations Committee Room, and Maggie had Scoop [Henry Jackson] there. He called up all the people in the house, all seven members, and they were all there, except I don't think Tom Kelly was there, he sent his first assistant, and think we had about four or five. We're all there. Scoop was there, and so was [?Meads?], and got to stop and think of all the names.

WILLIAM 00:08:51

Kelly?

ERNEST 00:08:52

Kelly was not there, but Brock Adams was there, I think [Tom] Foley was there. We had them all, I think two of them. I think, we had five people's house and represent the other two. And we stayed an hour and a half, went through the whole thing, Tyree spoke his piece, we spoke ours, told the whole damn story. And finally, Maggie said to Scoop, "We all better send a telegram to the Department of Labor and tell them, get on, we want to make this money available to Seattle." I think Scoop said, "[?Cotto?], my routine is going to get unhappy with us." Maggie and Scoop, Maggie said, "To hell with it. It's time we did something to straighten this mess out." And so all seven members of the House and Maggie and Scoop signed a telegram drafted right while we were there, sent a telegram to Shultz that night, telling them they want to make, what was it? \$250,000, \$300,000 available. And went over there, which was pretty good I thought. Maggie was just superb, got all the money, listened to Tyree, other times we did something, and they all went along. Funny how Scoop and all the others waited until he made his position before anybody say anything, but he did it. You got to have great respect for the old guy. A lot of people say he's a Wheeler Cleaner, maybe he is, [?my God, I'll be damned?], Maggie goes with the people.

WILLIAM 00:10:13

Always do.

ERNEST 00:10:14

Huh?

WILLIAM 00:10:15

Always do.

ERNEST 00:10:16

Well he did. He went with him against the unions. And they didn't like it out here, Austin St. Laurent, my old friend who I see him from time to time, and fought with vigorously on this issue. But we did it, and we got the telegram, and we got a promise of money out here. I don't think the damn money really ever--but Lindberg and the House and Senate people and Chamber of Commerce and whatnot, we put tremendous pressure on that goddamn Central Labor Council. Boy, did we, every way we could, and they finally gave some ground to the point where Tyree got some people into [?apprenticeships?], and I kept that University of Washington, hired a guy out there.

We got [?warrior?] out there now, you've probably met him. Big, tall, six-foot four. He's Black, able. He's out there. And before him, I had hired old General [?Rusk?], retired army general, and he got the best seats loud and clear. And he acted like a general running these god damn contractors. And he was a tough old bastard, sixty years old. He used to go around make a physical inspection. And for a while, I told Tyree, "Send somebody with him if you want to." But they got to trust old General [?Rusk?], and the old guy really put the heat on those contractors to the point where our reports were right on the money. We had the people, none of the other contractors had any qualified minorities working on jobs. We had them all on the campus. We, that's what was going on. We had all the people who were minorities in the trades and Black, probably [?working the worst jobs in the universe?]. We didn't--I was going to tell those, I was going to tell him, I just said, "You guys, I told someone, I told them all, you guys, I know 'em all. You have them here, or you got a problem, because you signed a contract with us, and that federal"--what you call it, clauses in there?

WILLIAM 00:12:15

Executive Order.

ERNEST 00:12:16

Huh?

WILLIAM 00:12:16

Executive Order.

ERNEST 00:12:17

11246. You guys signed that now, god damnit, you live up to it, because that's what we agreed to. The university agreed to that. Now, you guys got to do it. That's part of the game. And I don't care if you can't find trained minorities or not, you get them out here and train them. By God, they did. They got people in there. I never had trouble with Tyree. I liked him. He had more courage in that little body he has than 90% of the people I've known on this earth. I respect him. I think he's intelligent. I think he's been fair with the contractors, and he did his damndest just to keep the thing from blowing into violence. He had his own tires ripped, his own people were fighting him for a while. He had rocks thrown through his windows of his office. He never gave up. He stayed in there, and he tried to keep it even, he didn't try to create any violence. He did his best to bring attention to the problem, he didn't have to go to jail. The minorities are in the trades today. He opened the gate, nobody else would have had the mentality. If it hadn't been for Tyree, those construction trades would probably just, the door would be shut just as tight as it was. That really sums it up, I guess, because I saw that.

WILLIAM 00:13:29

Okay, let's go back to maybe point by point confrontation with the CCA and university. I think the first confrontation was when they--I don't know what date, I don't have a date, the chronological order.

ERNEST 00:13:43

In April sometime.

WILLIAM 00:13:46

Now, how did the university respond to that specific incident?

ERNEST 00:13:51

Well, we were concerned as hell, because if we closed the job down, I had to tell the president what to do, [Charles] Odegaard at the time. I knew if I closed the damned jobs down, the contractors would lay it on us and shut the job down and give us all hell. So we wrote them a letter, and I forget what it was, and you can probably find that letter out there. We wrote the contracts, quoting the job order to them and what they were supposed to do and better live up to it. I forget how it was, and it's their responsibility to maintain peace and whatnot on that job. I did my best to do in such a way, they couldn't come back on us with a change order for a million dollars. You understand I'm talking about? We're delaying and stop each other try to hang it on them. At the same time, I didn't want to get the point where there's going to be armed confrontation. The contractors called out the police, a lot of their workmen, I know one of them was carrying a 308 rifle in his cab. But we struck, and we, and I'm sure Tyree had some of his people had a few guns on him. I was scared to death that there was somebody going to really get--once those bullets started to fly, where would it stop? Now Tyree knew, and I knew, and it was a dangerous game. We closed that damn job, finally, the day we dumped the trucks in there, told the contractor, "Send them in."

WILLIAM 00:15:00

Was that the first day, or second or third day of the demonstration at the university? Was it--

ERNEST 00:15:04

It wasn't the first day, I think the second or third day. The police were coming out there, everything was happening, and everybody was sure. No, Ben McAdoo was out there with tears running down his cheeks. Saying, "Christ, do some people are going to get killed!"

WILLIAM 00:15:17

So the first day, was the police there?

ERNEST 00:15:21

No, I don't recall that they were.

WILLIAM 00:15:24

Okay.

ERNEST 00:15:25

My memory is a little fuzzy on a lot of that. I'd have to go back and look at the record.

WILLIAM 00:15:30

Okay, on the second day--I mean, not second day, the following incident, the second one. I think that was after the court order. And it was Howard S. Wright. I think it was Howard S. Wright, the construction company. And they were doing the Health Sciences building. What initiated that confrontation?

ERNEST 00:15:49

I can't remember why--I'm trying to remember why Tyree moved in on that one down there. For some reason the contract--I'm not sure if it was Howard S. Wright, but the GSA wasn't living up to what they said they were. And Tyree was never, you notice, he never went in on private construction, he went in on public works jobs. And one of the reasons he came to university is he felt he was safe there. Safer than [?heaving?] people, less acts, less--I think I will tell you this--less possibility of violence occurring on our campus, than anywhere else. I used to tell him, "Jesus Christ, Tyree, I'm doing my best. Don't create more problems for me." He was very good about it.

WILLIAM 00:16:30

Okay, in terms of the Pacific thing, before you went in to negotiate, wasn't the city police there trying to get you to sign--

ERNEST 00:16:39

They started at at 5:30 in the morning, they stopped all people. They had to ring the police around the whole damned thing.

WILLIAM 00:16:43

And it was ready to go in there and move the--

ERNEST 00:16:45

The university said, "no way." My [?bound?] chief police said, "hold it." University [?shot a hand?], it was.

WILLIAM 00:16:55

Who called the police, anyway? Was it a contractor, or was it--

ERNEST 00:16:58

I think it was a contractor, probably the night watchman, or whoever they had on the damn place when Tyree came in, probably called him. I never knew who called police. We didn't.

WILLIAM 00:17:10

But you and Dan Ruthford,

ERNEST 00:17:13

Ruthford, Wilson, I were the three that were there all day.

WILLIAM 00:17:17

That wouldn't let the police go in there, that wouldn't let--you wouldn't send in--

ERNEST 00:17:21

Hell no, I wouldn't let the police go in there.

WILLIAM 00:17:23

Yeah, okay.

ERNEST 00:17:24

Not if I had any say about it. They came in, they were coming in on their own.

WILLIAM 00:17:27

But the police wanted to go. That would be--

ERNEST 00:17:29

Oh, they would've, I think, they were up pretty tight about it, a lot of the policemen. I remember, we're having a lot of other disputes and disruption on our campus. And the whole damn thing was--we had the police out there because of student riots for a while. It was a kind of, no way. I never wanted the police around anymore. I always liked being able to work it out with negotiation. I was afraid if the police are there, we'd have a shootout, and that's the one thing that if that had ever happened, the campus, would never have been the same again for a hell of a long time, but it can't stay.

WILLIAM 00:18:00

Yeah, I was--that's the key incident I'm gonna try to focus on in my study, because that issue, that incident right there was a very volatile situation. If the police would have went in--

ERNEST 00:18:11

I went down there, I got called about seven or eight o'clock in the morning. I went right down there, went right down there, got a hold of Jim Wilson, a lawyer, [?he had to go to?] Tyree, and he and I went in there. We just went down and said, "Tyree, we're coming in." Got ahold a Ruthford real quickly, and got him out there, and the three of us went in there to sit down and talk. And we sat with Tyree and half a dozen of his top people in there for quite awhile.

WILLIAM 00:18:35

Was that the end of the university set of demonstrations, against the university?

ERNEST 00:18:39

And they weren't really working on us. We weren't doing anything. You know, Tyree wasn't saying--the University [?had an idea?]. We [?took up?] our end of it. I don't think--I think Tyree will tell you, we never violated anything we said [?as far as?] we were able to do it. I never promised anything I couldn't do, either. That'd be silly, never did. Why would I do that? I'd look for--only did what I could, and only said I could do what I thought I could do.

WILLIAM 00:19:06

Do you have any records at that point in time, in the university somewhere? I mean, Jim Wilson--

ERNEST 00:19:11

Jim would and [?Sedge Thompson?], you want to go talk to [?Sedge?], he was there. He was uptight about it, but I always left him out of discussions. I did it myself. I took heat as a front panel.

WILLIAM 00:19:24

Okay. Okay, I just want to piece another thing together.

ERNEST 00:19:29

Well you got a lot of work there ahead of you. What you want to do is go out and look at all the old rust files and and go see Warrior. He probably got the records out there.

WILLIAM 00:19:37

Who?

ERNEST 00:19:37

Warrior. I can't think of these first names. He works in the second [?war?] administration, though. He works with [?Sedge Thompson?]. He and General [?Rusk?], and if you can find old [?Ed Rusk?], he'd have the [?master?] of papers. He's the guy you want to find. He's still around. He's the man you want to talk to. He was meeting with Tyree every day. Where's old [?Ed Rusk?], do you know [?Aunt Marie?], where he lives, what he does?

Unidentified Speaker 00:20:11

He shows up on campus every once in awhile.

ERNEST 00:20:13

Well, go out and see. Neal Lessenger would be able to find in [?Sedge's?] office. That's on the second floor administration building. Go there and talk to them. Neil Lessenger was there through all of it. [?Sedge?] was there. Just me, you and I, [?Sedge?] used to have a hang up on this subject. He was all white, if you understand?

WILLIAM 00:20:35

I understand.

ERNEST 00:20:35

I was raised with Indians, so it doesn't bother me. My four years of university, three of them lived with a full blooded Indian, best friend I ever had. I was raised next to the Colville Indian Reservation, and I've never been bothered whether the man was Black, white, green or yellow. But the guy, that's been raised in a completely white environment got tight, you understand? Oh yeah, I don't have to tell you.

Go talk to old Sam Kelly about me, he'll tell you about me. Sam and I are best friends. He's one of the best men that worked at the university, tough, able, and he put a program together without much help from anybody in that place, not much help from me. He never [?fight on time?]. He always wanted to pay his people more than I paid mine. [laughs] The hell with that noise! Oh boy. [?The boy Bill Junior?], good man. Boy, don't misunderstand me. I respect Sam Kelly, I think he did more in three or four years than [?Captain?] could ever do. He may antagonize half the place doing it, he couldn't have done it any other way. He took them all, one and only, took me on. He wouldn't give a crap. He said in front of the president one morning, "Conrad, I'm going to give going to get you," and "I said, that's fine, Sam, you go ahead." Good man. That's because I embarrassed him. He was trying to tell me who to hire, and I told him, "I hire my own people. You hire yours and I'll hire mine."

WILLIAM 00:21:56

Oh boy.

ERNEST 00:21:59

I never--you know, I'm a son of a bitch.